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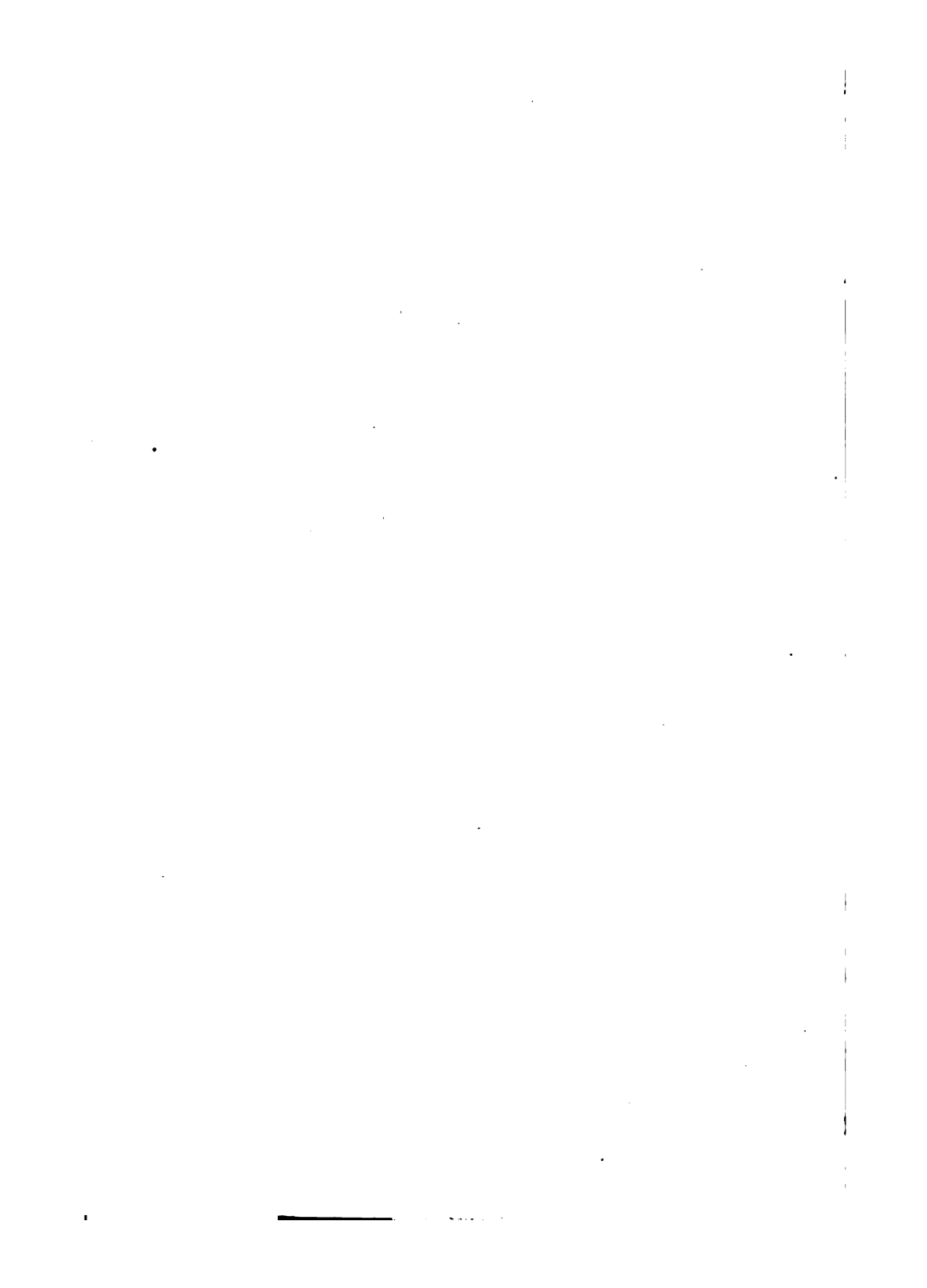




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Marion Twigg.

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DAVID WESTREN.



DAVID WESTREN.

BY

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DEDICATION.

To those, whose quiet and persistent heroism
in saving life exceeds all that has been dared
in destroying it, to all faithful ministers of
the art of healing, this poem is with the
deepest respect inscribed.

DAVID WESTREN.

Man's portion is the aspect of his God.
On lives that amble down a gentle slope
Faith rides at ease, and casts a passing glance
Of pity, scorn, or hatred, on the wretch
That struggles through the mire of misery,
Doubting if Love hath willed it. Some there be,
Who, smitten by their Maker's heavy hand,
Yet challenge not the omnipotence of Love—
Bright souls, the sunshine of whose genial health
No tears can quench, or minds whose loyalty
Proves stronger than all reason, or meek spirits
Not smarting 'neath the lash of unjust wrath ;

While some—unwilling Stoics—grimly smile,
And ply, with aching heart but steady hand,
Their needful toil, and ask not Whence nor Why.

* * *

Not the whole earth can show a fairer sight,
More haunted by the spirit of the Past,
More overgrown with old-world memories,
That cling about it like the clustering growth
Of its own ivy-shroud, more eloquent
Of the strange pathos of this human life,
Than is the village church. It is the soul
Of all around ; so near it seems at once
To nestling cot and field and tree and star,
So tender in its simple harmony
With the sweet quiet of the countryside ;

As if it grew there of its own pure will,
And loved the soil that bore it. Softly falls
Its guardian shadow on the sleeping flock,
Low lying in their last and silent fold,
While they who soon shall share that beauteous rest
Are kneeling to the Lord of life and death,
And o'er the graves and through the yew-tree creeps
The murmur of the ages. Envy there
Doth cease to gnaw his heart, and Scorn forgets
To curl the lip, and hate and avarice
And pride, and all that poisons human joy,
Are turned to loveliness ; the snarls of Strife,
With all our little swelling selfish cares,
Are hushed ; the blustering voice of Tyranny
Is awe-struck ; but pure love and gentle thoughts,

Forgetfulness of wrong and utter peace,
Hallow the sombre garden of the dead.

Nor is the life of him, who doth control
That unambitious realm in serving it,
Less beautiful and blessed, so the man
Be worthy of his calling. He alone,
Saving the healer of their bodies' ills,
Knoweth the dumb abysses that lie hid
Within the darksome bosoms of the poor,
Sees life in all its nakedness, and moves
Familiar through the depths of joy and woe.
His hand it is that seals with Christ's own sign
Our children's brows, that joins their trembling hands
In closest compact ; his the voice that breathes

Firm consolation o'er the closing grave,
Whose tones can still the bickerings of spite
And slander's garrulous tongue. 'Tis his to strew
The seed of wholesome knowledge, his to shed
A fruitful sunshine through the dullest home,
Lifting its grovelling cares to nobler aims ;
While week by week, oft as the Sabbath hush
Descends upon the country, while the loam
Dries on the empty wain, and by the hearth
The sheep-dog basks, and even the wild birds
Seem conscious of the holy day, 'tis his—
O high and happy service !—to stand forth
Amidst his flock, within those sacred walls
Where generations of the sons of toil
Have lived their purest hours, and feed their souls

From that old Book whose beauty doth not fade,
Whose wisdom, passion, truth and tenderness
For nigh two thousand years have been the stay
Of tottering faith, the balm of bruised hearts,
The widow's comfort and the martyr's shield.

All this is his, and more ; the pastor hath
Earth's dearest gift—a home whose daily life
Squares with his calling ; simple constant joys,
Without excitement and without remorse,
That lengthen days and brace him to endure
His dark experiences, the ruffian's oath,
The breath of sickness and the bed of death.
Beneath his roof the lofty and the low
Find equal entertainment ; poverty

Hath not made lean his heart, nor riches dulled
Its native sympathies, but all his ways
A kindly grave refinement ever haunts,
Begot of generous lore, unharassed hours
Of musing, gentle birth, and Christian love ;
And if his brain may lack the ample scope
Of those whose thought is free to range at will,
Yet oft a larger heart doth compensate
For tranquil breadth of judgment, and the man
Is loftier than his creed.

Ev'n such an one
Was David Westren ; not a man more loved
Through all the breadth of that fair shire which seems
A miniature of all our island's charms,

Whose bosom reared in England's noon-day pride
Her rarest spirits,—the rich old shire of Devon ;
There slumber in deep vales her warmest homes,
There lie her greenest pastures, softest woods,
Her wildest streams, her loneliest sweep of moor,
And there the Western Ocean thunders forth
Its mightiest harmonies. He knew them all,
And loved them, as the heir of some great name
Loves the old scrolls that tell his fathers' deeds ;
And his was no mean stock ; his sire, well pleased
To ply the surgeon's craft, could yet claim kin,
Though here and there broken or dim the line,
With that proud Earl whom zealots sought to mate
With England's kingly Queen, whilst yet the gloom
Of Mary's brow darkened this happy land.

Nor had the old man left the precious trust,
Which all inherit and must all bequeath,
No richer for his stewardship. Full oft,
At night returning from some couch, where Death
Had fled his calm quick hand, the Atlantic blast
Broad-bellowing o'er the moorland, and the sleet
Blinding his watchful eyes, his restless brain
Outstripped the storm, careering through the mists
That coldly veil futurity's dim waste,
Some day to lift as glorious clouds, and melt
In showers of blessing, when her wilderness
Shall blossom as the rose. Full oft, returned,
His hasty meal at end, and scarcely snatched
A too brief space of hardly-won repose,
The midnight lamp lit up his furrowed brow,

Bent on the page that told from o'er the sea
The latest marvel of his art, of knit
To prove with lens the subtle seeds of ill ;
Whence rising, he would pace his lonely room
With flashing eye, quick heart, and cheek aflame,
Forecasting the wide hope that dawneth now,
Its brightest ray beaming from eager France,
On plagued humanity ; that every pest
May, by long culture of its ravenous germs,
Be turned against itself, and slowly starved
From out its stronghold. His was the first hand,
In all that custom-nursing shire, that steeped
The sufferer's senses in a painless trance,
Ere the knife did its cruel kindly work ;
His the first hand, when all the veins ran flame,

That ceased to rob the weak and panting heart
Of that which fed its strength.—A brave, wise man ;
Above his place, yet scorning not its toils,
Before his day, yet faithful to its needs.

He, dying of a scratch, by chance self-dealt
Whilst seeking life for others in the dead,
Called to his couch, ere yet the fiery flood
Had wrapt the lofty citadel of mind,
His three stout sons, each from his distant post ;
The first-born from those walls which all the might
Of Heathendom ne'er reared, where day by day
The Son of Man is worshipped in good deed,
Where such poor forms, as thronged at set of sun
Around the Great Physician, find a hand

Waiting to heal, a voice attuned to soothe ;
The second from his care of field and flock ;
The youngest and most prized—for his dear life
Nigh cost the mother's—from his books and sports
In that old city peopled by the young,
Where Time becomes a boy again, and life
Flows ever fresh, a bright and laughing tide,
Through halls grown grey in brooding o'er the past,
And streets that totter with the weight of years.

They by the bedside stood, young David's hand
Locked in his father's grasp, who gazed on all
With such deep eloquence as dying eyes
Alone can pour, and spake in trembling tones :—

“ My sons, my own dear sons, you come in time
To hear my blessing and my solemn charge,
Ere Death makes hideous pastime with his prey ;
God grant, for your loved sakes, the venomous fangs
That soon will fasten on my reeling brain,
Convulsing all my frame beyond control,
May do their office quickly ; that not long
These eyes, that now brim o’er with conscious love,
May glare on you in fierce forgetfulness,
A ghastly mockery, too remote for tears.
Grieve not, my children, that a single tree
Is blasted to the base, before its fruit
Be fully ripened ; for no higher lot
Is dealt to man than this, to lose his life
In a good cause ; and though my special toil

-

The slow research of years, seem labour lost,
Yet from long mingling of aspiring souls,
In God's own time, shall spring the master-mind,
Whose thought shall win the eagle's height, and scan
The dark recesses of the realm of pain.
A vast mosaic is the face of Truth ;
We fashion each with patient narrow sight
His little block, tinted with one self-hue
Of light or gloom, as suits his mood ; then comes
The master, and with wider vision schemes
Of these a fancied feature ; God alone
Knoweth the aspect of the perfect face.
Nor wills He that the meanest piece should fail
From out that mighty work, if but the hand
Were true and firm that wrought it. O my sons,

Be faithful above all things to the light
That burns within you, wheresoe'er it lead,
To shame, to death, to loss of faith itself ;
Thus only can new paths be found at last
Through trackless seas of ignorance ; and think not
That pilot's life is cast away, who finds
In depths unknown an unrecorded grave.
O, for the honour of High God, be true ;
For they blaspheme His faithfulness who deem
That earnest thought e'er led the soul astray.
Let not ambition, poverty, or scorn
Corrupt you to forsake the side of Truth,
How thankless, how deformed soe'er she seem ;
So only will ye know the peace of God."

This and much more he spake, Death standing by
To weigh his words ; and when three days had passed,
A desperate conflict over—for the frame
Was iron-knit, and battled to the last—
They closed the sunken eyes, and with held breath
Kissed the white brow and left him to his rest.
But in the dead of night the youngest came,
And kneeling at the bedside laid his head,
Aching with tears, upon his father's breast,
And whispered to his heart, " I will be true ;"
And while he lingered by the open grave,
Those sounds were in the throbbing of his blood,
And pleaded in the moaning of the wind ;
And evermore his father's dying words,
Which only in the fateful hours of life

Rang in his brothers' ears, possessed his soul
And ruled his lightest action.

But the stroke

That robbed him of the firmest of all friends,
A wisely-loving father, was an ill
That carried its own balm—the need for work ;
And not as yet knew he the grief that snaps
The spring of deed and drains the fount of hope,
The tears that wash the colour out of life,
Making each night a frantic prayer for death,
Each morn a lingering torture, with dull eyes
Fixed ever on the past. His equal share
Of the small hoard, his father's selfless thrift
Had heaped to meet the hour of need, he spent

In training for the soldiership of Heaven ;
Deeming himself full rich if once he stood,
As they of old, not having purse or scrip,
Yet girt to serve his Captain. But not long
Was poverty, that prunes luxuriant growth
To bear more fruit, that saves the warmth of youth
For starving age, and keeps life's relish keen,
His comrade ; for the widely-honoured name
His father left him, joined with his own worth,
His noble mien and courtly eloquence,
Availed, ere many years had flown, to win
An ample living 'mid the tors and streams
That bred him, and the loveliest home in Devon.

Sheltered it lay beside the bosomed slope

That nursed the little village, and the church
Peeped from the woods in whose soft lap it slept ;
Although some fields removed from humbler homes,
'Twas more, it seemed, in modesty than pride,
As if it sought to screen its wealthier lot
From its poor brethren ; for it rather showed
A lordly cottage than a pastor's home ;
A mossy thatch, with ivy half o'ergrown,
Proof against summer's sting and winter's tooth,
O'erpeeped the lattices, set wide to drink
The garden's breath, whose lingering scent should lure
The sleeper to sweet dreams ; while sunshine beamed,
Or moonlight glimmered, in the rooms beneath,
Through creepers, wreathing with their tangled flowers
The long verandah shading all the front ;

There the white jasmine, rose and honeysuckle
Twined lovingly their arms and mingled free
Their fragrant kisses ; pale canary-creeper
Climbed in its one brief summertide of life
As near the sky as they ; and the sweet pea
Reached feeling tendrils to each drooping spray
And lightly curled around it ; but when these
Had shed their petals on the thirsty wind,
And the few feeble blossoms, that still strove
To smile, were smothered in a wealth of green,
Came Autumn, and with lovely petulance
Set all aflame, while 'mid the glowing leaves
The clematis, proud empress of the fall,
Arrayed herself in purple.—Such the bower ;
Whence sloped a lawn, studded with beds of bloom,

Streaked with trim paths, and dappled with the shade
Of flowering trees, down to the riverside.

There for three years he dwelt, a cheerful man,
Beside his lonely hearth ; though oftentimes,
The full flood chafing in his Celtic veins,
His big heart bounding and his cheek on fire
With draughts of ocean-air, a mighty want
Would on a sudden famish frame and soul ;
And passion-gusts would sweep through every nerve,
Like the warm pulsings of a great south-wind,
Melting his inmost core, and drowning sense
With wave on wave of strange delirious hope.
Then would a vivid presence, far away,
A dream of darkling eyes and silken hair,

An ecstasy of all things soft and pure,
A rapture of all grace and tenderness,
Possess him like a frenzy ; and a soul
Would seem from these to clothe herself in shape,
Like Venus rising from the spray ; a form
His strong arms ached to clasp, and all his being
Yearned to enfold. Yet nowise was the man
Of sensual cast, no kin to those slow beasts
Whose dull desires crave coarsest excitants
And constant whetting ; agony and death
Were such to him, whose heart, though strung to cope
All day with horse and hound from tor to tor,
And scarcely own the strain, yet thrilled and shook
Before the downcast lashes of a girl.
Less was he one to chill the zest of life

With thankless self-repression, or lay waste
The sunny fields of joy with monkish scorn,
Or fret away the substance of delight
In idle day-dreams, or forego the care
Of his loved flock to battle with himself—
Dangers that still beset the lonely priest.
No healthier life than his on all the moor ;
A lover of good cheer ; a bubbling source
Of jest and tale ; a monarch of the gun ;
A dreader tyrant of the darting trout
Than that bright bird whose azure lightning threads
The brooklet's bowery windings ; the red fox
Did well to seek the boulder-strewn hillside,
When Westren cheered her dappled foes ; the otter
Had cause to rue the dawn when Westren's form

Loomed through the steaming bracken, to waylay
Her late return from plunder, the rough pack
Barking a jealous welcome round their friend.
Yet was the sportsman's heart as kind and soft
As any mother's; he would turn aside
To set the struggling beetle on its feet,
Or stoop to lift a pallid worm, surprised
By daybreak, and restore it to the grass;
Children would hang upon his willing arm,
Dancing for joy beside him, as he strode
Through the small thorp whose heart and soul he was;
And not a cottage threshold but well knew
And loved his footstep. Nobly could his voice
Render the lofty music of the Word,
While sunbeams streamed across the well-filled church;

Boldly apply it, in all charity,
To present need ; nor mar the good effect
By dealing it as patrons deal a dole,
But rather as all brethren at one feast.

Thus for three years he lived, a lonely man ;
Till, at a look, the secret of his breast,
And all the folded powers within his soul,
Expanded ; as a bud, that long hath swelled
In russet sheath, suffusing its shut heart
With faintest tints of beauty yet to come,
Bursts at a glance of summer, and lays bare
The splendour of its bosom to the sun,
Revealing deepening hues, which but for him
Had languished into pallor. Such a sun

Is love, and such a bud the heart of man.

'Twas on a flashing morning, storm and shine,
And April like a wilful maiden laughed
To see her own bright tears, and rainbows played
With huge clouds, huddling to a sullen heap,
Yet crowned with pearl, while overhead the sky
Was fresh-bathed blue ; snow here and there still clung
Along the dusky ridges of the moor,
Dwindling the farthest distance to a span ;
But where the river, like a silver thread
That wanders o'er a cloth of brodered gold,
Wound through the fragrant glory of the furze,
Fluttered the first white butterfly, and larks
Left with a cry of joy the twinkling wheat

To mount upon the sunbeams. At first dawn,
Led by the muffled voices of the stream,
Enswathed in mist, had Westren wandered forth ;
Snatched a sweet breakfast, with a mossy rock
For seat and table, and for drink a draught
Of the pure torrent rioting its way
From pool to pool ; had cast his mimic fly
Where'er a deeper eddy offered hope
Of stouter prey ; and now, his creel well-stored
With many a supple victim, homeward bound
Loitered in vacant mood.

When, as he reached
A sudden bend, where the pent river made
A whirlpool, fretting 'neath the hollow bank,

Smiled over by a blackthorn-bush, that vied
In snowy radiance with the sunlit foam,
A vision met his eyes which sent the blood
Back to his startled heart, and held his frame
Entranced.—Upon the further bank, one foot
Lost in the yielding sand, and one far-stretched
Against a fallen bough, that made the stream
Swerve savagely but left a tranquil pool
Beyond, there stood the figure of a girl,
Shapely and full and tall, in all the grace
Of unrestraint ; a joyful eagerness,
Save for one swift glance round, had banished shame
As far as from the brow of any child
That tumbles in the hayfield ; her light arms
Cared but to rule the sturdy trout, that leapt

And struggled for its life, bending the rod
Toward its dark lair beneath the twisted roots ;
Her wild-rose cheek was burning with the pants
That shook her giddy heart ; her soft grey eyes
Flashed triumph, and the tawny hair flew loose
About her face, rejoicing to escape
The hat, blown off and dangling at her back.

But scarce had Westren stumbled on the thought
To steal away, then raise some warning sound
Of song or crackling thicket as he neared
The blackthorn, when she turned, as if aware
Of one that watched, and turning met his eyes
Fixed with delighted wonder on her own.

Then, quick as the deep blush that flooded cheek
And brow and neck with crimson, she drew back
The witching foot, and stood erect, her face
The plaything of contending pride and shame ;
While the big trout, a moment free, rushed in
Beneath the tangled drift. But, net in hand,
Splashed Westren to the rescue, with gay laugh
And merry words of compliment ; and soon
The trout lay floundering on the grassy bank,
A gallant fish, all flashing to the sun
In silver mail inlaid with scarlet gems,
His back thick-sprinkled as a leopard's hide
With rich brown spots, and belly of bright gold.

Then followed broken talk ; and then a pause

Whose sweet oppression only young hearts know,
When the tongue fails and all the brain is steeped
In languor, when the breath comes fast and faint,
Laden with cherished sickness, when the heart
Is lost, and in its place a sense of want
Curdling the frame with bliss, till arms and lips
Tingle with tender promptings.—O that life,
Time and the world could stand for ever still
In that deep pause, dearer than tongue can sing,
Or heart imagine that hath felt it not,
Dearer than they who own its spell e'er know
Till all the dew on life's best flower be dry.—
Great God ! could not the wealth of might, that went
To build this world, have framed a lesser orb
And saved it from decay ; could not Thy love

Have willed that life's best pleasure should outlive
One melting hour?—We thank Thee for the hope
That cheers us to our downfall,—while it lasts ;
But ah ! 'tis sad to stand beside its wreck,
And see the lovely longing of the bud
To blossom full, the passion of the boy
For manhood, the blind hunger of the youth
To rush from love's light promise to a feast,
Which, though 'tis sweet, yet dulls the first fresh sense,
And leads through loss and mourning to the grave.

So Westren lived one hour of perfect spring,
Beseeching love with eyes, if not with lips ;
And the fair girl who moved beside him felt
Delicious tremor, and a conscious fear

Of her own beauty, while her faltering steps
Seemed wandering through a fresh-born world, her breast
Breathing strange air, the warbling of the birds
New eloquence, and earth and sky and sun
Quick with a life that had not been before.

Thus, all too soon, they reached a lovely nook,
Where the loud river, storming down a stair
Of giant boulders, smothered its complaint
In meeting woods, whereon a film of mist
Slept like the bloom upon a purple grape.
There sat her father, busied with his brush,
Seeking in vain to catch the subtle play
Of light and shadow, as the great white clouds
Sailed over, and between their frowns a world

Of gradual hues, a million tinted boughs
Answered the sunlight. A famed artist he,
Not courting Nature in her bolder moods,
But wooing such fine changes of her face
As man may never hope to win, albeit
With failure such as most would deem success.

A glad smile chased the sadness from his brow,
Hearing the ripple of his daughter's laugh
Behind him ; but still gazing on his work :—
“ Well, Sunbeam, and what sport ? ”

“ Look, father, look !

“ For this we have to thank a friend in need.”

So saying, she displayed her spotted prize,

Bending her blushing face to point how here
And there the living splendour of his sheen
Had faded ; while the father jealously
Took measure of her comrade, as he rose,
Encumbered by the girl's glad arm, to greet
The stranger ; who, with easy dignity,
After due deference paid to riper years,
Described that morning's chance, his neighbourhood
And calling, and with modest thoughtful praise
Of the half-finished picture took his leave.

But once he paused, ere yet the lovely nook,
Now lovelier for its tenant—as all things
Are fairer for the presence of a girl—
Was lost to view ; and pausing, saw her form

Stooped o'er her father's shoulder as he worked ;
Her form, but not her face ; for that—O joy !—
Was gazing toward him, just as long a space
As love could wrest from shyness ; then 'twas hid
Quick as a bird's head turns—and one great gasp
Burst from the heart of Westren, like the leap
Of the whole blood when from a deadly wound
The shaft is drawn, flooding his frame with fire,
And lighting up a fever in his cheek,
Which raged throughout the day, and all that night
Scared slumber from his pillow.

But what excess
Of balm, what overflowing of content
Ev'n to dismay, what slaking of his thirst

Almost to drowning, had he stood at dawn
A spirit in her chamber, all unseen,
Yet seeing all ; had watched that maiden shape,
Cast lavishly in Nature's choicest mould,
Rise from her wakeful bed, and open wide
The casement, and look forth upon the stream
With hot pale cheeks and tired eyes charged with tears ;
Then fling herself again upon the couch,
And sigh and smile, and press with dimpled hand
Her tender-housed young heart, low murmuring
" Ah ! love, ah ! love, I would not have thee gone ! "

Small need to tell that daybreak found the man
A restless pilgrim to the spot, where first
Their eyes had mingled in the warmth of youth.

How scant of flowers the blackthorn seemed ; how chill
The meadow-mist ; how void of sense the chirp
Of bird and ceaseless rattle of the stream ;
How changed and empty all !—Small need to tell
The maiden's fear and longing, as she roamed
That day, no further from her parent's sight,
Than timid nestling trying its young wings
Near to the home it longs yet fears to leave.
The rabbit rustling through the withered fern,
The leaping squirrel, or the laughing jay,
Would send her fluttering back, with frame that thrilled
As if 'twere all one heart, and icy hands
Palsied with nervous pleasure. Smaller need
To tell how rose and lily lost and won
Their thrones within the empire of her cheek,

When, with the tumult of his heart proclaimed
From out his eyes, the master of her life
Stood once again before her.—Love like theirs
Is reinless as the lightning, and will cleave
Its way through heaven and hell.

And so there came
A moment, when the pleading of their eyes
Grew giddy-blind, and the two gazing souls
Swam into one another, and the strength
Of man and maid, and all the heart of life,
Death and for ever, mantled to their lips
And sealed them in a long devouring kiss.
As when two streams, whose rushy sources lie
Wide-parted on the moorland, trickle down

For many a lonely mile, till far away
They hear each other's voices calling low,
And gather speed and volume, bearing still
Nearer to one another, till at last
With one glad leap they mingle, and flow on
Through barriers of rough rock, through marsh and wold,
Through flowery meads and music-breathing woods,
Till the salt tide turns all their life to tears
And the great deep receives them.

All our fate

Hangs on an unknown moment. As a child's
Light laugh may rouse the slumbering avalanche,
So some weak thing—a passing shower, a snatch
Of song, a glance, a step—oft wakes our doom.

How stern soe'er the law, we know it not,
We still must wrestle with a phantom foe,
We still must bow the head, as oft in tears
As thankfulness. The balances of God
Are fine beyond all reckoning, howsoe'er
Fraught with eternal issues.

So these two
Became one flesh, one heart, almost one soul
In wedlock's soft constraint, and seemed to move
As in some vivid dreamland, where delight
Is law and sweetest sin no more debarred.
And little wonder, if the tender maid,
Rapt in a space so short from cool repose
To burning tumult, from the morn of May

To July's noon, oft felt the power of love
Brood like a thundercloud, yet cleft by rays
Of hope, and soon to pass and leave the sky
Untroubled.

But one night, the waning moon
Hidden beneath a brow of cloud, that lowered
For leagues along the black horizon, girt
Each with the other's arm the lovers sat,
And listened to the sadness of the sea.
They watched the myriad links of liquid gold
Quiver away, until the deep was all
One heaving darkness and a world-wide moan
Swept o'er it like the spirit of despair.
Then Westren felt a strong convulsion shake

Her gentle breast. "Love, let us go," he said,
"You shudder, and the night grows dark." But she,
For answer, threw her arms around his neck,
Her head upon his heart, while passionate sobs
Waylaid her utterance. But when that swift storm
Was over, and she raised her tearful eyes
To close beneath his kisses, lingeringly,
With much self-blame for foolish doubts and fears,
She told her mood.

"Forgive me, dearest one,
And God forgive me ; but a dreadful doubt,
Ev'n when my heart was fullest of fond thoughts,
Chilled through me, like a blast of cruel wind
Nipping the bloom of spring ; the awful doubt—

Father of love, forgive!—if love indeed
Be worth its heavy cost. Darling, to think
That one of us must stand some day and watch
The other pass for ever out of reach,
Helpless, then fall beside the dead, and feel
O such a loneliness, O such a waste
Of anguish, that my heart foreboding it
Reels, as the weak brain reels when it essays
To grasp eternity. Is God in truth
A niggard creditor, Who doth require
Strict payment for the joys we call His gifts,
For children's smiles the pangs of motherhood,
For youth's bright fitfulness the fogs of age,
For wedded love the widow's wintry heart,
For every bliss a pang—a lifelong score

Of pains and tears, remorse and weariness,
Till death discharges the grand debt of life?
Is God less generous than ourselves, or weak
To do His will ; or is this loving heart
No image of His love, this straining brain
Helpless to comprehend ?—Then wherefore life ?
Not for man's pleasure ; pain and fear forbid ;
Not surely for God's toy ?—Kiss me, dear heart !
My soul is strangely troubled, but the cloud
Is melting in the radiance of thy love.
See, how the moon breaks forth and strews the waves
With glory ; so thy presence gilds with light
The deep and darksome trouble of my soul.
To feel thy kiss is worth more agony
Than life can hold."

Then Westren, his strong arm
Enfolding her, as when a father folds
A cheering arm around his frightened child,
Spake words of manly comfort, not unmixed
With reverent faith:—"for Christ Himself hath known
That utter desolation, and the path
He trod can never more be wholly dark.
And for love's cost—unless a tree or stone
Deserve our envy, all that makes us feel
Exalts us, and is welcome though with tears."

So passed the one dark storm across their moon
Of wedded rapture ; and next night they lay—
O sweet and strange delight !—in their own home,
All doubt and tumult calmed, and both their hearts

Steeped in content. What sure repose of love
Glowed from the man's dark eyes, as deep he drank
The twilight of the girl's; what perfect peace
To lay his head on her pure breast, and feel
Her soft arm clasp his neck, her golden hair
Fall light as gossamer o'er brow and cheek,
While through the open lattice came the scent
Of honeysuckle, jealous of her breath,
And mingling with her sighs the stream's low voice
Made slumbrous music.

Then what new delight
To waken to her presence, watch the heave
Of the white bosom as the eyes unclosed,
Kiss the soft peach-bloom of the rounded cheek,

The snowy loveliness where cheek joined lip
And health and joy and womanhood were met
In dimpled union. What refreshing bliss
To lead her through the garden, bright with flowers
And sunshine, ringing with the songs of birds ;
To see her, at the cheery morning meal,
Peep round the urn, the better to enjoy
The fulness of his face. What calm of pride
To guide her through the village, every hand
Doing her kindly reverence ; and to note
The happy wonderment of those who came
To pay due homage to the pastor's wife ;
And mark the smile that lit the sick man's brow,
When, laden with sweet flowers or dainty food,
Always with gentlest words, her radiant form

Shone like an angel's through the gloom of death.

And then the precious evenings, all too short,
When reverently they communed with the souls
Of the great dead, who live for evermore,
To light the generations on their way,
And hold a candle to the heart of Man ;—
The Hebrew seers, the subtle brains of Greece,
The mirror-mind of Shakespeare. Or they dwelt
With no less love, if lightlier, on the page
Of bards whose voice and pinion is to theirs
As linnet's to the lark's. But most they joyed,
With twin intent and sympathetic hands,
To spell upon the ivory keys the thoughts
Of those rare souls, whose poesy is writ

In world-wide language, eloquent of moods
Too vast, too deep, too delicate for speech ;
Heart-searching strains of harmony, to which
The measured music of melodious words
Is stammering discord ;—Handel's stately pomp ;
Mozart's clear gracefulness ; the piteous wail
Of Schubert ; and the monarch of all song,
Master of all the human heart can feel,
Infinite pleading, awful tenderness,
Titanic power—Beethoven's stormy soul.
Oft would they rise from this with throbbing frames
Drained of emotion, and would wander forth
To lose among the summer stars the sense
Of human greatness.

Dearly too they loved
To thread the narrow over-arching lanes,
Seeking some rare wild-flower, or scramble up
The steep hedge-bank for prize of moss or fern ;
Dearly, when skies were fair, to track the course
Of moorland stream, and take their gipsy meal
Where the exulting eye could roam o'er leagues
Of naked loneliness—a billowy waste
Of russet grass, peat-ruts and spongy tufts,
Heaving away to hills whose rocky crests,
Storm-hewn to shape of beast or heathen god,
Scowl at the ocean crawling far beneath—
A desolation wearing on its face
Marks of perpetual warfare ; grisly scars
Dealt myriad ages back by fire and ice,

And wounds fresh-furrowed by the torrent's share.
A silence like the hush of a dead star,
Save for the whisper of some tiny life,
Some exquisite, translucent, wingèd thing,
That slept all winter through the thunder-clang
Which shook the very tors ; as oftentimes,
In Nature's tender irony, a spire
Of fairy grass takes shelter where the pine
Dares not to rear its head.—Then home across
The saddened wilderness, until the glow
Of furze and heather, and the hoary blue
Of bracken, and the evensong of birds,
Broke the weird charm.

Nor were their least delights

Rare visits to her father, in that hive
Of cares, that crowded loneliness, that heart
And brain of earth's profusest energies,
Whereto the veins and nerves of the whole world
Converge, where life fulfils its worst and best,
And loudest beats the mighty pulse of Man.

There would they hear the master-works of song
Souled forth as if the master's own right hand
Were swaying their full tide ; now wakening
The shiver of the violins, the plaint
Of the slow horn, the clarionet's sweet sigh,
And yearning sorrow of the double bass;
Now rousing all to fury, and again
Lulling the storm of music to a moan,

As of some weary spirit wandering forth
For ever homeless o'er the deep of pain ;
And then a dance of fairies, light as dew,
Mad whirl of witches, or voluptuous maze
Of black-eyed girls beneath an Eastern moon ;
And then a blast of strange sepulchral woe
Freezing the blood with nameless dread ; and last
A strain so jubilant, sublime and strong,
It seemed as though eternity were made
One triumph-arch, through which, while Heaven and Earth
Rang with applause of millions, God Himself
Marched.—But dull words are vain ; music is all.

So Westren deemed ; and oftimes, homeward bound
From such repasts, broad themes of melody

Still rocking through his brain, would chill his wife
With silence unawares ; feeling himself
A worm within a well, and those great lords
Of song enthroned upon the mountain-tops,
Too high almost for worship.

Kindred joy,
But reverence less bewildered, as the art
Of sound is rarer than the art of speech,
He felt, when Shakespeare's worlds of mirth and grief
Lived on the stage before his brightening eyes,
Gesture and garb and scene conspiring all
To emphasize the wondrous poesy.

From these delights returning to their home

Embosomed in the moor, they felt fresh joy
In Nature's outer loveliness, a joy
Which palls for those who never quit her side,
A joy distinct from close communion held
With Nature's soul, or never-tiring quest
Among her boundless marvels. Even so,
His knowledge of her spirit's worth undulled,
A lover's relish of his mistress' face
Oft fails for lack of absence.

Thus they lived

For years, one flesh, one heart, almost one soul,
In wedlock's soft constraint ; and two fair babes,
A boy and maiden, filled their home with glee
And winning ways and tender hopes and fears ;

And grew, like flower and sapling, to such grace
Of girlhood, such fine manliness, that life
Was one long May-day.

So the Pastor reared
A perfect home ; and, alway thanking Heaven,
Shed sunshine wheresoe'er he went, and cheered
The wretched with the warmth of his glad face,
The poor in bliss with bounty of his store,
And preached a God of mercy, love and joy.

But tremble to be happy !—Human joys
Are but as glittering rain-drops, lightly poised
On life's black, naked tree ; a sweep of wind—
A shower of tears—and all the tree is bare ;

A few calm, cloudless days—and heaven's loud
With thunder, and the angry brow of Fate
Frowns as of old on man's brief happiness.
Within yon fruit-fair cheek the worm Disease
Lies coiled ; beneath yon smiling water lurks
The monster Death, and sits with open arms
At foot of yonder precipice.—Climb on,
Poor mortal, with strained hands and bleeding feet,
Climb on !—but ere thou reach the top, ev'n while
Thou pausest to take breath and gaze with pride
Upon the hard-gained height, comes One unseen
And hurls thee to the base.—Let earth's proud lord
Cast off the mail of faith, gird on the proof
Of fact, hedge round his life with gathering power
And cunning, yet the bow at venture drawn

Will pierce through all ; and who shall name the hand
That drew it, or if any hand there be ?

* * *

A spotless August sky, whose fresh young blue
Had faded in the heat to blinding grey ;
A sound of waters, like a ceaseless tale
Told in a dream ; a solitary cleft
Between two barren hills, where drowsily
The glinting river trickled through rude blocks .
Of granite, scarcely gilding into foam,
Scarce wrinkling the brown mirror of the pool.
There, in the shadow of a rock, her head
Laid on her mother's lap, whose happy hand
Played loving-careless with the straying hair,
Reclined a girl ; a blossom just awake

To its own loveliness, half bud, half flower ;
Her tender-tinted cheek now flushed with sun
And moorland air and joyful exercise ;
Her grey eyes gifted with a twofold light,
A sparkling outward glance of frolic health,
An inward glow of sweet self-consciousness ;
A younger Sybil Westren, whose blithe spring
Gave promise of a summertide as fair
Even as hers, who, bending o'er the girl,
Seemed moulded into perfect motherhood.

Sleeping awake she watched the sparrow-hawk,
With level wings at rest and searching head,
Sail o'er the silenced furze, till with slow sweep
He dipt beneath the ridge that swam with heat,

And timid chirpings broke the hush ; or traced
Along the heather, bending 'neath his weight,
The great green caterpillar, who, with Spring,
His lowly slumber ended, will flaunt forth
An emperor-moth ; or listened to the shrill
Small singing of the cricket, and stretched out
A lazy finger toward it, or to pluck
A whortleberry larger than its kind
And almost out of reach, the sun-browned hand
Foiling the whiteness of the arm that peeped
A moment from its sheath.

When suddenly

She started, and a pallor blanched her cheek,
Like a rare flake of snow that settles soft

On a rose-petal in mid May ; her eyes
Were fixed with terror, while her trembling hand
Clutched at her mother ; who, in anxious love :—
“ What ails you, darling ? ”—But the startled girl,
With frozen whisper, shrinking back :—“ See, see !
It flutters nearer, nearer—there—again—
The snow-white bird—it flutters in my face—
Save me ! ”—and so fell swooning on the breast
Of the scared mother.

But that moment rang
A glad halloo ; and up the rugged cleft,
From rock to rock, came springing a fair boy
Of thirteen summers, health and hope and glee
Bracing his limbs and dancing in his eyes,

His shouldered fly-rod nodding at each bound ;
And no great way behind him, but with steps
More cautious, climbed the father.

At whose voice
The maiden's eyelids lifted, and once more
The darkened life dawned rosy in her cheek ;
But still the terror of the snow-white bird
Disturbed her, as the billows of the deep
Cease not to heave, although the storm be past
That raised them ; nor could all the mother's smiles,
The boy's kind clumsy jests, the father's arm
Of love, though all were sweetly welcomed, chase
The vision from her fancy.

But that night,

The boding mother watching with wet eyes
And lips of whispering prayer, the maiden slept
A fretless slumber, and next morn arose
Her own bright self, and all their fears were stilled.

So summer swelled to autumn, and again
Shrank into winter, and the snowdrop's life
Made petty earthquake in the thawing soil,
Yearning to know the light ; and that coy flower,
The white narcissus, reared its coronet
Above the frail forget-me-not, and cloves
Hung their big heads and spiced the sultry air ;
And thus the semicircle of the year,
Laden with blossom, brought once more the day

Of Sybil's terror ; and a cloudless noon
Beat on a little lonely cove, begirt
With sandstone cliffs. Above, the golden corn
Basked ; and below, the tiny languid waves
Scarce stirred the cowrie, lying like the tip
Of a babe's finger on the broken shells.
There, in a cavern, where the weed drooped limp
And clotted, and the sea-anemone
Slept closed in cups of brine, so clear and still
They seemed as empty, maid and mother found
A cool asylum, and the dripping roof
Was music to their ears.

Then, while the sea
Trembled with longing and its sparkling eyes

Smiled welcome, one by one the girl unloosed
Her snowy garments, till the last thin robe
Slid lingering to her ankles, and she stood
Naked before the sun—the loveliest sight
He ever gazed on ; paused, and held her breath
One moment for the faintest sound, then picked
With dainty feet her way among the rocks
And hidden pools thick-mantled with brown weed,
And gaining a firm plain of printless sand,
That glistened here and there with slabs of wet,
Ran like a cloud-chased sunbeam, her bright hair
Fluttering upon the wind of its own speed ;
So met the sea, and trampled its repose
To spray, that made a spangled veil of white,
Up to her waist, and falling forward thrust

With shining arms the unwilling flood aside,
Braved the soft wavelets with her softer breast,
The ripple's rapid kisses with her cheek,
And sank beneath and never rose again.
The sea gave one calm smile of deep content.

Such calm as dwells upon the face of Time,
Rolling his flood, now lightened by the flush
Of sunrise, now by evening's pensive hues,
Now by noon's steady glitter, o'er the wrecks
Of systems, with their countless loves and hates,
Ambitions, struggles, wisdoms, arts and faiths ;
Upon whose bosom sails this sun-born world,
Beneath whose bosom shall it slowly sink
With its starved crew Mankind.—Time well may smile.

So with the setting sun they stole the girl
From the bereavèd sea, and bore her home,
And laid her lifeless on the bed, her face
White as her bosom and the weeping hair
Clinging about her shoulders ; and one star
Tearfully trembled in the maiden cheek
Of eve, and through the open casement found
The mother kneeling, with convulsive arms
Outstretched and panting heart and streaming face,
The daughter lying with hands meekly crossed,
Breast marble-still and lily-curtained eyes ;
Tumultuous anguish, absolute repose ;
Heart-rending irony of life and death.

But ere the flowers, fresh-planted on her grave,

Had learnt to love their home, while autumn spread
Wide wings of mist and sunshine o'er the land,
Brooding in silence, or with stormy sob
Raved through the dripping trees, another grave
Lay by it, 'neath whose raw, red mound there slept
The brother.

For one noon—a swift sea-fog
Blinding the blue and drenching all the hills
With twilight—a grey look of anxious thought
Swept like the mist across the mother's face,
Now quick to fear the worst, remembering
Her boy gone forth at daybreak with his dog,
To trace the toddling of the baby Dart,
Through darker pools an ever-narrowing stream,

Through thicker sedge an ever-hushing song,
Up to its lonely source. And when the lamp,
An hour before its time, brought not the light
And solace of his face, the mother passed
Restless from room to room, needle and book
Laid down as soon as taken up, and clasped
Her chilling hands, and ever and anon
Peered through the parted curtains on a gloom,
That, seen from such a nest of ruddy warmth,
Looked drearier than itself; yet strove to mask
Her fears from Westren, gaining from the fraud
Small comfort. But when night, like fiends at play,
Roared in the chimney, and the driving rain
Hissed on the fire and lashed the rattling glass,
The father left his chair, a look of stone

Hardening his face, took staff and lantern, kissed
His trembling wife, and murmuring, "Keep good heart,
My darling, all may yet be well," passed down
The low, dark hall.

But ere he reached the door,
The bitter whining of a dog in pain
Was heard above the tempest, and the scratch
Of eager paws against the oak, and next
A sharp, impatient barking, like the knock
Of one who looks for welcome and comes home
To find his own door barred.

A shaft of ice
Shot through the father's bosom, and he felt

His wife hang heavy on his arm, her grasp
Tighten upon it, as he drew the bolt,
And, with a yell and buffet of the wind
That stopped his breath, let in the shivering dog ;
Who, crouching with a moan at Westren's feet,
And gazing up with simple wistful eyes,
Dropped from his mouth a scarf.

Hour after hour,
Ashy and thin, her heart a fluttering flame
Scarce living, every breath a gasp of prayer,
The tortured mother lay. The clock's dull pulse
Smote on her straining sense, as smites the slow
Monotonous labour of the funeral bell
On the stunned ear of her who kneels beside?

The empty cot, while to the grave is borne
Her child. But when a sickly dawn, whose eyes
Were bleared with stagnant tears and passion spent,
Moaned o'er the ruined woods, and made more wan
The mother's wasted face, the garden latch
Clicked, and a measured tramp of feet drew near,
Heavy as with some burden.

At the sound

She rose ; but while she staggered to the door,
It opened, and the guardian of her life
Folded and held her back with gentle force ;
And reading that she read the worst :—"Not yet,
Dear wife, not yet. Death took him with rough hand,
If kindly-swift. Our boy is safe with God."—

But she caught

No word, but hung as helpless in his arms

As hangs a broken ivy-spray half-torn

From the stout oak it clasped.

Nor ever more

Saw she her son, nor learnt how those stern rocks,

Whereon he fell, had marred the fair young face,

But languished sorrow-stunned, with memory's lamp

Too dim to search the darkness of the past

And find the woe there hidden.

Yet two years

She lingered, while the husband's lips became

Daily more pale and silent, and the frost

Crept through his hair, and lines of hard resolve
Estranged his face from those that loved it best,
And spake, like rifts of earthquake, of the strife
That raged beneath. But to his wife the man
Was tenderer than a woman ; and his eyes
Would glisten, watching her ; and all day long
His thoughtful hands would ply her with small deeds
Of kindness, which, like ripples on a lake,
Keep fresh the depths of love ; so that she clung
More fondly to his strength, and praised his care
With words that oftimes drove him from her side
To screen his tears.

And oft on summer eves,
Tending the flowers that drooped their dewy heads,

Still warm with sunset, where the children slept,
While twilight round the churchyard folded soft
Her murmuring wings, and far away the thrush
With broken music soothed his mate to rest,
She ceased her toil, and sat with tearless eyes
Low-linging o'er the flowers, and whispered how
She loved them better than her garden-brood,
And blessed the mercy of the hand that lulled
Children and flowers so tenderly to sleep.

Then, standing near, the man would turn away
His face, and stare upon the cloudless sky
Lying death-pale along the blackening moor,
And storm would gather to his brow, and waves
Of fire would labour up from his swoll'n heart,
Scalding his throat.

But never grief or dread
Assailed the sweet wife more ; for day by day
A drowsy sadness, as of a tired child,
Stole o'er her ; and the heart that ne'er knew hate
Grew yet more loving to her God, her home,
Her husband, and her dearest friends—the poor ;
Till, when the long nights mourned the dying year,
Close watching by the fever-bed of one
Deserted for his sins, her gentle lips
Breathing no censure, breathing naught but love,
She took upon her own pure arm the blow
She warded from the wretch, and, readier far,
Laid down her stainless life without a sigh.

Four days of silence through the darkened house,
Of whispered words and noiseless feet ; four days

Of reverent hush along the village street—
And round the open grave, a little space
Held back by awe and pity, thronged a flock
Larger than ever, till that sunless hour,
The muffled bell had gathered. In their midst,
With head erect, bared to the hueless sky,
Calmer than marble, colder, stronger, stood
The pastor. Like a frost his silence held
Their breath ; but when the stony lips had moved,
A shudder shook the listeners ; for the words
Of comfort, uttered in that distant tone,
So hard and level, chilled them to the soul,
As Death himself were speaking. Never once
Quivered his lip, or quailed his voice ; his eyes
Gleamed fixed and clear, as though the fount of grief

Were ice-bound ; and when, quicklier than their wont,
The awe-struck crowd moved whispering from the spot,
They left him an old man, with face upraised
Defiant to the winter heavens, with teeth
Firm-set and hands tight-clenched, standing unmoved
Beside the open grave.

But when his eyes
Had looked their last upon the flowers that hid
The coffin, soiled and shattered with the clods
Whose hollow fall yet rattled in his ears,
And heaving one long sigh he turned to seek
His lonely home, the storm within his heart
Brooked not its mocking silence, with broad day
Pointing a pallid finger at the bed

Where last she lay, her fire-side chair, and home
Bereft of all that made the name so dear,
But drove him to the moorland's desolate breast
For sympathy.

With quick mechanic stride
He crossed the fallow fields, freckled with spots
Of livelier green, the river's sounding bridge ;
Scaled with unbated speed the upland slopes,
Where the spare pasture struggled for its life
With hungry growth of furze and bracken ; gained
The heather, where the rusty bells still clung
And rustled 'neath his feet, the huge grey tors
Looming like ghosts of storm, and mantled loose
With streaming mist ; sped down the craggy hill,

As sure of foot as one who walks in sleep ;
Plashed through the sucking moss and swollen brook ;
Nor paused for breath, nor slacked his pace, until
The ceaseless clamour of the lonely Dart,
So old yet ever new, raved at his feet,
Bathing with spray the dear familiar rocks,
Their picnic haunt ; where oft, with wife and child
Couched at his side beneath the broad blue sky,
And helping with their smiles the gladsome sun
To lighten that stern scene, the man had sat,
And counting up the treasures of his life,
And love that beggared all, had blest the God
That gave it.

Like the spirit of the scene

He stood, and turned upon its loneliness
A face as cold and drear. The weeping rocks
Shook with the thunder of the flood, now swoll'n
To thrice its summer volume—a mad race
Of boiling whirlpools, over-riding all,
With tawny foam-flakes scudding on the blast
Or dancing in a huddled drift behind
Some granite block that barred a troubled pool.
The rotten rushes whistled, and the heron
Heavily rose and flapped its way to wastes
More lonely yet, while overhead the gull,
Storm-driven inland, wheeled against the wind
Saddening its pauses with a homeless note
Soon drowned in wider wailing.

There he stayed,
Enfolded by the sorrow of the moor,
Till heart and limb grew cold, and evening's dusk
Deepened the dusk of mist that all day long
Had steeped the spot, and scanty plumes of snow
Drifted from underneath heaven's downy wing
Of mottled grey. Then homeward by the course
They last had traced together in the glow
Of love's brief summer, rock and fern and stream
Flecked with the softness of the setting sun,
And all that heaving wilderness asleep
In purple splendour.—Ah! the change to this!
The wind's lament, the torrent's headlong rage,
The driving sleet, the blank dismay of heaven,
Decay and desolation—and within,
A winter past all words.

So twilight fell

Upon the moorland village, and the trees
And hedges lost their hues, and stared more black
Against the snow ; and when the first pale lights
From cottage-panes besprinkled the white street
With brilliants, and round many a hearth, close-drawn,
A merry ring of rosy children laughed,
While inly smiling the neat mother spread
The simple board, and listened for a step
To gladden gladness,—the bowed form of him,
Whose pastoral care had cheered the lives of each,
Crept, worn in limb, in spirit all too firm,
Slow through the silence toward his cheerless home.

Hollow, as when one treads within a vault,

Echoed his footstep in the hall, where late
His children's voices and his wife's soft smile
Made warmth and music ; and the house, bereft
Of Death's tremendous presence, felt more dead,
And colder, emptier seemed his room, and all
Familiar objects meaningless.

His food

Scarce tasted, and the lamp burnt low, he sat
Past midnight staring at the dying fire,
Heedless of cold and wide awake, his mind
One ferment ; for the anguish of that day
Had wrought a life's experience, and beneath
The icy hardness of an outward calm
The deepest powers that sway within the soul

Had done fierce battle. And as some generous child,
Chastened he knows not why, lets fall no tear,
But noble anger floods his brow with flame
And tumult shakes his breast, so Westren chafed
Impatient 'neath the random scourge of Fate :—

“Let come the worst ! The dregs of life are left,
The bitter dregs, to prove. This wretched drop
Of comfort yet remains—to sternly test
Each harsh ingredient of the poisoned cup,
And drain it like a man. But never think
I'll kiss the hand that proffers it. Say'st thou
'Tis God's hand?—And this torrent of wild thought,
Undulled by passage through a thousand minds,
Welling direct and clear from the riv'n depths

Of mine own soul, this passionate cry that pleads
For hearing against all I held most true,
Braving hope's utter ruin—is not this
God's voice?—Or hath the God that spake of old
Grown silent to his children, or their ears
Deaf?—Were the young world's nerves more quick to feel,
Its heart more soft than ours, who stand amazed
Far up time's painful steep, and see above
No summit, and below the dim horizon
Of buried generations, and around
A silence, broken only by the sad
Low voice of the departed and the throb
Of daily life?—Was thought's rash childhood truth,
And hath it grown to manhood of a lie?—
How then keep faith in childhood's truth, how then

Have faith in aught?—This thing at least I know ;
There dwells within each soul a still deep voice
That knows not how to lie ; whose simple force,
How slow soe'er its conquest, shall prevail,
Shall swell with mild persistence, till it drown
The shrill complaint of shallow enmities,
And fill the world with pity, peace, and love.
That voice I dare not stifle, and it cries :—
' Better to face eternity, misled
By steadfast cleaving to an earnest doubt,
Won at all hazards, dark and comfortless,
Than nurse with lukewarm breast a flattering creed,
Idly inherited from hearts, whose blood,
Shed for its sake when others held it not,
First made it precious. Better to feel, awake,

The smart of the soul's wounds, to see and brave
The worst, than bind the aching eyes and drug
The spirit into stupor. Better now
For me, and, in the world's long run, for all.'

I trust 'tis God's own Spirit that so speaks,
Cheering my lonely wretchedness, as oft,
When looks of hate, more scorching than the flames,
Glared from around, its strength-instilling tone
Hath cheered some steadfast martyr at the stake.
I trust 'tis He ;—yet, if it be not He,
I am not quite alone, not quite alone.
For as, when faints away some master-note,
Struck singly, all the kindred nerves that lie
Within the spacious instrument are touched

And tremble in their sleep, till slowly grows
Around that lonely note a whispered chord ;
So, when some searching passion cries aloud,
And no man living answers, one by one
The kindred spirits of the deathless dead
Vibrate in sympathy, till far away
Is heard the murmur of a mighty choir
Sustaining the full concord. Thus awakes
The voice of conscience in the soul of Man.

A chorus of the brave and kind and true
Of all time, countless as the stars of heaven ;
A music like to theirs, profound and low ;
And one still voice, distinct amid the rest,
My father's :—' O be faithful to the light

That burns within you, wheresoe'er it lead,
To shame, to death, to loss of faith itself'—
Father, I will!—Witness the God, Who wrenched
The sickle from His trusty labourer's hand,
Already bowed to reap a golden store
Of blessing for the sick, a harvest sown
In sacrifice, watered with tears, and reared
By sleepless toil!—Witness the God, Who tore
The opening flower from where it grew to shed
Love-light on all that passed, and quenched its smile
In the brute sea!—Witness the God, Who robbed
His puny sad ones of the joyous strength
Of my brave boy!—Witness the God, Whose breath
Froze the warm current of my darling's life
And turned my own to bitterness!—The pain?

That's little—we're no cowards—Heaven's harsh blast
Is not so new a thing but men have learnt
To stand erect against it like the oak,
Women to bow beneath it like the reed ;
The pain itself is little ; but to find
In Him I held all-loving, wise, and strong,
A weak, an erring, or a cruel God—
This 'tis that troubles me. What good soe'er
Be born of pain, a God all-wise and strong
Could otherwise have wrought, and would have wrought
Were He all-loving. If, to save His love,
We grant Him baffled by the stubborn stuff
He deals with, either then He lacks full strength
Or wisdom to choose means. And though 'tis writ,
'My thoughts are not your thoughts,' yet pain abides

And sin, some too strong Devil, or a God
Of rapine, wreck and lust—a bushman's God.
No man, wise, kind and strong, would scheme a world
Like this ; and if our kindest, wisest thoughts
Reflect not His, He is no God of ours,
We never hear His voice or feel His love,
And worship is mere pastime.

That fierce race,
Whose 'eye for eye and tooth for tooth' made pain
Sin's scourge, that 'jealous God' Who bade the child
Drain to the dregs the grandsire's bitter cup,
Taught us stern fact, but tightened the hard knot
That none hath yet unravelled ; and though Christ
Spake of Siloam's tower and justified

Those murdered Galilæans, His mild law
Shifted the ground indeed, but stifled not
The old complaint that still ascends to Heaven.

What answer?—When long-suffering Job stood forth,
Abhorred of all his kind, and conscience-clear
Arraigned the Lord, what answer wrested he?—
‘Go to!—If, having giant’s strength, I choose
To use it like a giant, who art thou
To say me nay?—Behold leviathan.’—
That were a Lord to flatter, not to love;
He shirks the spirit’s challenge, puts us off
With beasts and storms and splendours of the sky,
As if we lacked reminding of brute force,
As if we never felt its clumsy hoof,

As if the bulk of twenty million whales
Were worth one pleading soul, or all the laws
That rule the lifeless suns could soothe the sense
Of outrage in a loving human heart?—
Sublime?—majestic?—Ay, but when our trust
Totters, and faith is shattered to the base
Grand words will not uprear it.

Where then turn?

To Christ?—Far off—an echo from the dream
Of deepening twilights, when, a stormy boy,
I sobbed beside my mother's knee, my face
Hid in her lap, her gentle trembling hand
Stroking my head—I hear the Sabbath words
That women love, 'Come unto me all ye

That labour and are heavy-laden'—Ah !

The grave, sweet sadness, moving men to tears !

Ah ! the soft music, like the rise and fall

Of some mild angel's breast, who bears to heaven

The suffering child he watched o'er !—But to me

What helpless loveliness !—a briony-spray

To one who needs an oak-staff. How shall I,

Whose sufferings profit nothing—nay, whose grief

Hath robbed this poor world of three precious lives

And palsied all my powers for good, find rest

Because Christ suffered to redeem a world ?

I too would gladly suffer for some end

Seen as He saw the end for which He died.

We hold Him God. Would that we held Him man !

Then were the sense of God's abandonment
At our worst peril easier to be borne—
Our Brother bore it—But if He be God,
Clad with God's strength to bear and overcome,
Knowing Himself for God, foreknowing all,
What merit was't in Him, what help to us
In bearing ill, who are not gods but men ?”

Thus many a night he wrestled, many a day
Sought by long toiling o'er the withered moor
To tire out soul with frame ; and shunned to move
Amidst his flock ; for when a winding lane
Had brought him face to face with some rude boor
Trudging his heavy way, a troubled look
Of wistful wonder, like the human look

In a dog's eyes that sees his master grieve,
Would dignify the poor rough face, and raise
Fresh waves of tumult in the pastor's breast.
And wheresoe'er he moved, all joyous things
Seemed smitten into silence and abashed,
As in the presence of some mighty grief;
And everywhere the quick keen eyes of Pain
Found food to grow by, horrors scarcely seen,
Or, seen, scarce noted by the eyes of Joy
In quest of healthier nurture :—the fierce hawk
Preying upon the dove's soft eyes, with claws
Deep in her breast, and the grey down that warmed
Her nestlings clinging to his blood-stained beak ;
The sheep that lay for days with shattered limbs,
Sustaining torture on the scanty grass

In reach of where it fell, till now it lies
A-dying with dim eye upturned to heaven ;
The wounded plover trailing through the heath
A bleeding wing.—And then his frenzied mind
Would wander to like scenes of human woe ;
Would see upon the Western prairie-plain
The agèd Indian crouching o'er the embers,
With sunken cheeks, and hungry hopeless gaze
Fixed on the wide horizon, where his tribe
Had vanished many an hour ago ; the seaman
Just dead beside his mates, while far away
The sail he prayed for with his last faint breath
Shines all too late.—And then his thoughts would rush
From the lone desert to the jostling throng,
Where flash of lights and roar of wheels o'erpower

The inward wail ; would enter some dark room,
Where wondering children huddled, and the wife
Knelt, white almost as he whose hand she held
To feel the last dread tremor ; or would hear
The splash and oily gurgle of the flood,
Thick with a city's foulness, where some girl,
Whose childhood knew the scent of cottage-flowers,
Had found oblivion. And each fearful scene
Shifted to yet more fearful—nameless wrongs
And cries of helpless innocence, the babe's
Short life of moaning, and the sleepless fang
Of cancer gnawing at the strong man's breast,
Famine's lean cheek, the maniac's lightning eye,
Hate, murder, lust, revenge, remorse, despair,
And all the hideous armament of Woe,

Till earth seemed hell, and the grey, weeping sky
And sobbing wind bewailed a world of pain.

Then all the generous instinct of the man
Uprose indignant, and he groaned aloud :—

“How have we sinned, to merit such hard lot,
My wretched fellow-men, and I, of all
Most wretched? The blind bolt strikes all alike,
Half-gods no less than those who seem half-fiends,
Me too, who know myself nor fiend nor god,
Who know myself a simple, true, brave man,
Like many a million more ; but know few men
For whose worst fault the sternest earthly judge
Would doom them to a tithe of what they bear

Guiltless ;—and earthly justice may not weigh
The tainted blood, the atmosphere of sin,
The inward agony ; but He, Who knows
How fathered and forefathered, how begot
In sin, how sin was food and drink and breath
And after what hard struggle sin prevailed,
Would stay His angry hand, were sin indeed
The cause of all we suffer.—Almost tears
Soften my long-parched eyes, when I recall
The piteous tenderness of love in pain ;
And yet the sea-bird circling with short sweeps
Around his wounded mate, divinely blind
To selfish danger, wails not to call forth
Man's pity, since the sights that most would move
Have oft no witness, and for every tear

A thousand hearts unheeded bleed to death.

Marvellous?—ay, most marvellous, if the Power
Who wills it thus be Wisdom, Might and Love,
And there be none with strength to thwart His will.
The very beasts must marvel at a world
So crammed with fair and foul, desire and hate,
Laughter and tears—good God! to think men laugh
Rippling along the shallows, while the depths,
Where no sound is, await them.—Who so dull,
Or drunk with happiness, or drugged with woe,
As not to marvel at this world's great girth,
A lesser planet of a lesser sun,
That sun a mote of star-dust in the vast
Of endless space sun-swarmling, whilst his feet

Thou a tiny flower where lies enwrap
Life within life for ever, and he stands
Amazed amid the boundless Universe ?
Then suddenly the consciousness of self
Besets him, and the rushing of his thoughts
Deafens him, like the rushing of the blood
In one who swoons ; and all that fills the world,
Its hugest feature and its frailest birth,
The storm-built mountain-tops, the rainbow-thread
Of gossamer, the mammoth and the gnat,
The unnamed insect in its little world
Beneath the moss, the puny giant Man,
His cities and devices, wars and wealth,
His thrilling story, passions, arts and creeds,
His poor six feet of sod when life is done—

All that has ever been or is on earth
Throngs and appals the soul, and most of all
The mind that thus can marvel—Wondrous?—ay,
Wondrous indeed! If God be satisfied
To make men gape, then let Him rest content.
But yestermorn, when all was blind with fog,
And from the black boughs, streaked with watery snow,
The drops made dismal music, that poor bird
I found scarce dead, trapped by some thoughtless child,
Who, like enough, shall prove a kindly man,
Its eyes half-shut and glazed with hours of pain,
Wakened a wonder that was more akin
To horror than to worship—

Alas! alas!

The wretch I am!—a torture to myself,

A stumbling-block to others. Grief like this
May soften pride and stoop the tyrant's neck,
But hardens tender hearts and sours the kind,
Who think—Were they Almighty, would they plague
Their helpless creatures thus?"—

So day by day,
When Dawn called up her phantoms from the vale,
He fled the shadow of his ruined home,
And followed her grey train across the hills ;
But, sick with sights of anguish, oft would seek
The prison of his room, where pain at least
Was narrowed ; till its channel grew so deep,
Its flood so frantic, that it bore him out
Again to wider sorrow for relief.

Nor even in the blessed hours of night,
When over life and all its weariness
A gradual veil is drawn, and Slumber's balm
Benumbs the sense, and Care forgets her load,
And Fear himself can smile, did Westren's soul
Find respite. Prayer, that breathes the air of faith,
Sank choked in its first accents ; and when sleep
Had barred his mind 'gainst all things from without
That fought against his peace, the ungoverned brain
Ran wild in fierce excess ; terrific dreams
Assailed him, and unutterable horrors
Poisoned his rest ; no deed so vile, so far
From waking thought, but he would wreak it out
With ghastly relish ; his wife's hallowed face,
With that dear look in it which made it hers—

Where poetry fails, where painting is so strong—
Loved more than ev'n its beauty, would bend down
And kiss him as he slept ; but when he flung
His rapturous arms around her, she would turn
A stiff, green corpse, and rot in his embrace,
Or mingle with her daughter and himself
In frightful revelry.

Yet never once

The impulse came, to baulk the rage of Fate
By self-destruction ; not for fear of aught
Might be beyond the grave—for well he deemed
Death's sleep was sound ;—but as some desperate man,
At bay before a host, casts not aside
Nor turns against himself his sword, but sets

His back against a rock, and plants his foot,
And locks his teeth, and knits his brow, resolved
To sell his life for somewhat, even so
Stood Westren, firm, indignant, and resolved
To brave the worst, die hard, and at his post.

Howbeit, at times, most often when the twilight
That deepens to the week's last night, and seems
A drowsier dusk than that of other eves,
Summoned the village-pastor to prepare
Food for his flock, a sickness smote his heart,
Thinking how dull, mechanical and cold
Was now that worship which he once had led
With joy so full, how vain for him the prayers
That brought his hearers comfort, and how slight

His hold upon the faith whereto they clung,
Then would a longing seize him, to be quit
Of charge so grave, and add his modest wealth,
Saved for the dead, to swell his brother's store,
And end his days a shepherd of dumb sheep.
But when he marked the saddened brows of those
To whom he told his purpose, and the love
They bare him, and the good his care had wrought,
And thought upon the grey old church, where knelt
His darlings, and their graves beneath the yew,
He faltered, and thus communed with himself:—

“What matter form and symbol, so we love
And succour one another? Christ's command
Is clear, howe'er we wrangle o'er His Being.

And for men's dreams—methinks I see the smile,
The calm grave smile, would kindle on His lip,
Hearing some mother reason Hell away,
Her scapegrace son now dead. Our living faith
Is what we love and suffer ; and the truth
That changeth not with man, we cannot know,
And blunder when we guess at. Yet truth is,
Howe'er we blunder ; and shall God be wrath
That children love their dolls, the old ones best ?
Why should I shrink to lead their simple worship,
Seeing they ask it ? Doth a father shun
To share his children's mirth, because for him
'Tis make-believe, because his heart is sad ;
Much more, deny them comfort ? No man owns
More loyally the lordship of our Lord,

Or truelier strives to serve Him, as He taught,
By deeds of love ; and were His blameless feet
To-day within our streets, methinks men's doubts
Would chafe Him little, and His hand would grasp
The hand of many an outcast from the fold
That boasts Him Shepherd, and His test of love
Would turn much dross to gold, much gold to dross."

So wearily the winter suns went down,
Wearily rose ; the life of every morn
One sad, slow death. As when some sickly child
Dies from its birth, and paler day by day
The little thin face wanes, and stonier grows
The mother's yearning gaze of helpless love,
Until at last she closes the tired lids,

And kisses them, and presses to her heart
The babe that never smiled.

* * *

Yet Nature seems,
Like Man, not wholly ruthless at her worst ;
But, when her rage is spent, would seem to know
A rude remorse, and longing to atone
By mildness for the shocks her fury dealt ;
And while for those to come she doth prepare
New scenes of bliss, she slowly draws a mantle
Of loveliest clinging life o'er all her wrecks,
And hallows them with venerable grey.
So, month by month, the gentle touch of time
O'erlaid the ruins of the pastor's joy
With tenderness, and memory's gentle mist

Softened their cruel aspect ; till at last
A genial smile of sacred pleasure lit
His grief ; as when a sudden glance of sun
Breaks through a leaden thundercloud and lights *
Some abbey's gloomy relics, the grey stones
Glow, and the ivy flashes golden-green.

'Twas at that season when the hardened snow
Still melts along the hedgerows, but a day
Has fled the advancing summer-host, to be
The herald of its coming. Here and there
The hawthorn's glossy twigs were gemmed with green,
The violet low within her bower of leaves
Fed on her own sweet heart, the shining fields
Steamed in the sun, and all around was heard

The faint and subtle stir of springing life.
That morn had Westren felt unbidden warmth
Steal through his blood, and a swift sense of joy
Quickened his torpid pulse, he knew not why ;
Till, almost glad at heart, he left his seat
Beside the sun-quenched fire, and cast aside
His book, and sought the widow's lowly thatch,
Around whose husband's grave the footprints yet
Were fresh of those that bare him to his rest.
The door stood open, and the sanded floor
Was streaked with sunbeams ; other sound was none
Save the clock's laboured pulse ; a little maid,
Plying her busy needle, watched beside
A sleeping babe ; and perched upon a chair,
With restless, sidelong head, a robin scanned

The room, now dropping down to pick a crumb,
Now peeping in the cradle.

Spellbound stood

The pastor ; and the tenderness of life,
Its love and trust and beauty beyond words,
Smote on his grief like sunshine, and he felt
The icy hardness that had bound his heart
Yield, and his bosom swell, and blessèd tears
Flooding his brain and eyes with full relief.

But while, half-blind with welcome mist, he gazed,
Down the deep lane, her village errand o'er,
The mother bent her homeward steps. A smile
Of chastened gladness answered the kind thoughts

That sunned his face, when with a friend's firm grasp
He took her faltering hand and uttered words
Of quiet greeting ; and her brave, sad mien,
And eyes that brimmed with gratitude, sent hope
And strength through all his soul, and love toward Man,
And faith in love, and patience under pain,
And reverence for the Father of all Good.

So, warm at heart, he entered that low porch,
While with a curtesy rose the little maid,
And robin hid himself among the plants,
That filled the window, turning a full face
Of constant summer to the village street.
Soothing as twilight's chill to aching eyes
Was that calm atmosphere of sorrow ; sweet

As dawn's first rosy hue the tender bloom
Of maidenhood, that deepened as he laid
A fondling hand upon the child's bright hair ;
And a great gladness filled him, as he felt
The tide of life returning, and the glow
Of God's own wine once more along his veins.

Nor sank his heart again. That evening, ere
The green light faded from the sky, a sense
Of healthy slumber, cool and fresh, subdued
His heightened pulse, as if the hand that lay
One moment on the girl's fair head had drawn
Her childhood into all his blood. He longed
With wonder for the morrow, knelt awhile
Speechless beside his bed in more than prayer ;

And since all light but Nature's then had jarred
His tranquil mood, he laid him down to rest
By light of one clear star, and slept the sleep
She gives her darlings.

Buoyantly he rose
From dreamless slumber—yet a deep, dim joy
Had lived with him all night, like that which haunts
A sleeping child and curls his angel lip—
Threw wide the lattice, let the morning breeze
Thrill him, and soon was busied with his plants,
That long had lacked a master. Ne'er before
Felt he so calm, so strong to cope with ill
And foster good ; never before so loved
The green of earth, the boundless blue of heaven,

The rolling clouds, the triumph of the winds,
Man in his might and woman in her bloom,
The lavish heart of childhood, youth's wild hopes,
And all the myriad marvels and delights
Of this our strange rich life. And while his soul
Was borne along the great highway of Time,
The steady march of seasons, and the vast
Procession of the centuries, beneath
The transient stars and changeless void of space—
God knoweth whence and whither—swept his life
Along with its huge tide, and he rejoiced
To feel the glorious impulse.

Once again

His eyes were quick to greet all gladsome sights,

And passed in tranquil pity o'er those woes
Where Man was helpless. But two brief days since,
He scarce had marked the early-brooding thrush
That quitted not her nest when he drew near,
But gazed at him with bright and steady eye
As fearless as her love. Yet now all pain
Seemed to such precious beauty as the black
And barren rocks, whereon a man, who seeks
The diamonds lurking in their rugged clefts,
Wastes not a sigh.

And dear it was to move
Once more amidst his flock, to soothe their cares,
To share their glee, to toil for them, and feel
Their love encompass him ; while deep content

Flowed through him from that never-failing source
Of joy, whereat the saddest soul may drink,
That faith of every creed—the love of Man.
Bright gleamed life's scanty raptures, seen athwart
The dark background of universal pain ;
And why the Maker bade all joy be child
Of sorrow, and each sunbeam cast its shade,
He asked no longer ; but the pleasing pain
Of quiet work, and unambitious hopes,
Mingled the light and shadow of his life
To one harmonious grey, which, though it be
Less vivid than the radiant blue of spring,
Yet dreads no overcasting.

Ev'n his face

Partook his spirit's calmness ; and the light

That made his brow benign seemed not less far
From that gnarl'd frown it wore of late, than seems
The blossom from its root. And week by week
He spake of Christ the Man, Who comforts more
Than Christ the God, His scorn of selfish pain,
His love for children, flowers and all things sweet,
His care for suffering men and all things sad,
His loneliness, and sorrow wide as sin.
He bade his flock be strong to fight with ill—
No matter whence or why ; 'tis here ; enough—
To cleave to good, and reverence all things pure,
And love and help each other. Whatsoe'er
He bade them, that he wrought in constant deed,
Unwearied and undoubting.

So he lived

For many a year, beloved ; and grew each day
More gentle to the erring, poor and weak,
More pitiful and helpful, with his steps
More nearly in the footprints of our Lord ;
And evening stole upon him, clear and calm,
As shines a spot serene of tender sky
When storms are over ; and one twilight hour—
So still, the moth's soft flight beneath the yew
Was heard—he laid him down beside the grave
Where slept his loved ones, and there found his rest.

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"From whatever point of view regarded, this work must be pronounced a success. . . . Were this all it would be no mean achievement; but there is superadded a wealth of poetic thought presented in the most chastened language."

Liverpool Courier, August 14th, 1888.

"The whole poem bears an almost perfect finish. . . . The exquisite pictures of love, and the grace of descriptive narration are almost beyond praise. The expression of complex emotion and deep feeling are especially powerful. . . . Such rare promise as is contained in 'The Last Crusade' and 'David Westren' should secure in maturity a place among our fairest singers for Alfred Hayes."

Western Morning News, May 2nd, 1888.

"The work before us is that of a genuine poet. . . . Mr. Hayes has a peculiarly happy gift for describing scenery. . . His analysis of character is clear and discriminating, and the varying mental emotions are depicted with the hand of a sympathetic artist guided by the insight of a philosopher. . . . The work has the charm of originality both in conception and execution. Mr. Hayes's poem on 'The Last Crusade' won golden opinions. We are convinced that 'David Westren' will in no degree diminish the reputation which the earlier work earned for its author."

Western Daily Mercury, March 19th, 1888.

"The author of 'The Last Crusade' rose, by his first work, to a position of eminence among contemporary poets, and the predictions which discriminating critics based upon the earlier effort are more than fulfilled by the beautiful poem before us. . . . The author is as successful in the analysis and delineation of complex phases of character as he had already proved himself in description and narrative. . . . As a writer of blank verse Mr. Hayes is almost beyond criticism. . . . There are passages of 'David Westren' which seem to lose in strength and massiveness, simply by the perfect workmanship of the poetry. . . . And, best of all, the book is of the type which indicates not a consummated but a growing genius."

Bristol Mercury, April 24th, 1888.

"Of a high order for its depth of thought, moral purity, and religious light. . . . An entrancing story told with the poet's tender feeling and wise estimate of what is to come."

Western Times, February 23rd, 1888.

"In 'The Last Crusade' Mr. Hayes struck so high a chord, and produced such sweet and sustained harmony, that we opened his new poem with high expectations and some little trepidation. But a perusal of the new poem has confirmed the impression produced by his former book—that he is a poet, and a poet of very great merit. Both 'The Last Crusade' and 'David Westren' have so much heavenly music and true poetic fire as will ensure their being read with pleasure wherever English is read, and will place the author's name high up on the roll of fame."

Eastern Morning News, 2nd April, 1888.

"The graceful and finished verse of which he has shown himself a master. . . . Delicately and melodiously dealt with. . . . Ably and sympathetically treated. . . . Fully equal to Mr. Hayes's reputation."

Leeds Mercury, February 15th, 1888.

"Told in beautiful blank verse. . . . Mr. Hayes has communicated an extraordinary beauty to this simple story. . . . His book has abundant merits."

Dundee Advertiser, March 12th, 1888.

"Mr. Alfred Hayes is by no means an unknown poet. He has already made his mark. . . . The construction of 'David Westren' has been planned by a master-hand, and the language, while soft and sweet, and full of tender pathos, is marked as well with freshness, vigour, and great power of reflection. . . . There is a genuine ring about Mr. Hayes's poetry which cannot fail to attract. . . . Every detail is studied with its minutest effect. . . . He revels in all that is lofty and grand, weird and bold, soft and gentle. Each is painted in masterly style, and in an easy flowing diction that many a poet of older growth well may envy. . . . His descriptions are gems of delicate and graceful word-painting. . . . 'David Westren' displays true genius, warmth of feeling, purity of heart, immense power of thought, great range of language, and stamps the author as one of our most rising poets—a poet from whom greater things may be expected yet."

Devon and Exeter Gazette, May 19th, 1888.

"The analysis of David Westren's character is told in sweet and subtle language, the exquisite touches being enhanced by their realism. . . . The arguments which bring the book to a close are full of sound sense and reverent treatment. . . . Every page sparkles with descriptive beauty."

Bristol Times, February 20th, 1888.

"'David Westren' is the story of a noble, beautiful, and quiet life, told in graceful blank verse. The central character is a fine ideal conception."

Manchester Examiner, June 20th, 1888.

"The author of 'David Westren' is already known as a poet of an exceptionally high order, on the merits of his previous work, 'The Last Crusade.' . . . His blank verse has the easy rhythm and the simple diction of the master-hand. . . . A few quotations will show the picturesqueness of the style and the facility of description which the gifted author possesses, but the book should be read as a whole, and we heartily recommend it to all lovers of pure English poetry."

Bath Herald, April 28th, 1888.

"It is refreshing to turn to a poem like this, cast in a simple yet strong mould, full of romance and pathos and pure and lofty thinking, and characterised throughout by a lucid beauty of conception and execution. . . . Not the least noticeable quality of the poem is its originality. . . . The genius of taking pains is manifest on every page of the poem. Its author has 'the great poetic heart,' the possession of which 'is more than all poetic fame,' but Mr. Hayes has already won the fame in addition by his first poem."

Birmingham Daily Gazette, December 6th, 1888.

"The story is told in such beautiful language that the hearts of readers are melted. It is a safe thing to hazard that few readers will get through the volume dry-eyed. It is one of those books which nerve the whole being of the reader in a grasp of sympathetic pain. But the work is not wholly a phantasy of pleasing pain. It is relieved by many artistic touches of description which brighten the melody of the verse, while they do not lessen the pathos of the story."

Sheffield Daily Telegraph, February 16th, 1888.

"One is carried away by the drama and its melodious enunciation as effectually as the writer himself could wish. This is rare praise, but praise none the less merited. . . . In fact Mr. Hayes has given us a vignette of human life, sublimed as only an inspired poetic delineation of human life can be."

Midland Evening News, December 14th, 1887.

"The lines are of a level excellence, anon rising into a bright, lovely, or striking phrase. . . . But the signal merit of the poem is the lucidity of the narrative, and the impressiveness with which the history is gradually unfolded and borne in upon the mind of the reader. . . . The last-named scene is drawn with great power and pathos."

Manchester City News, March 10th, 1888.

"Mr. Alfred Hayes, who has won some just fame by his poem 'The Last Crusade,' has come forward with another poetic venture, 'David Westren.' . . . These passages will show that Mr. Hayes has poetic feeling, fancy, imagination, and manipulative dexterity."

Glasgow Herald, February 23rd, 1888.

"The poem is a pathetic record of a man's life, its love, strength, despair, and tenderness. It shows depth of thought and powerful analysis of feeling. . . . Stately and melodious blank verse. . . . We have read no book with the like pleasure for some time, and we predict for the author no mean place in literature."

Nottingham Daily Express, 5th March, 1888.

"The extracts we have given from 'David Westren' are more than sufficient to justify a repetition of the opinion we ventured to express when 'The Last Crusade' appeared. . . . If elevation of sentiment, quick sympathy with all that is noble and good, dramatic power, beautiful and original imagery, grace and spontaneity of diction, musical rhythm, and finish of workmanship go to the making of poetry which will live, then Mr. Hayes's new volume is one which the English-speaking peoples will cherish and prize for generations."

Staffordshire Advertiser, December 3rd, 1888.

"Among the crowd of books of verse it is a pleasure to meet with one which is worth the reading. . . . It is no small praise to add that Mr. Hayes shows as much power in the delineation of human emotions as in the description of natural scenery."

York Herald, April 23rd, 1888.

"A poem of much beauty and of much pathetic interest. . . . The narrative of David Westren's life, his romantic meeting with his future wife, of their absorbing love, and of their beautiful home among the leafy solitudes of Devonshire is very delightful reading."

Manchester Courier, April 27th, 1888.

"We do not hesitate to say that the reputation Mr. Hayes achieved by 'The Last Crusade' will not be diminished by his new work. . . . It grapples with the problems which now more than ever puzzle our intellects and at times well-nigh paralyse our wills. . . . Many a passage arrests our attention by its deep insight or its delicacy of feeling. . . . Yet it is not so much this exceptional beauty of isolated passages that most strikes us as the uniformly high level which is maintained. The style is absolutely free from affectations, and the English singularly pure and simple throughout, though never lacking in dignity, and often rising to most impressive eloquence."

Midland Counties Herald, December 8th, 1887.

"Mr. Hayes has the soul and the eye of a true poet, and his faculty of utterance is in every way worthy the lofty character of his thought and his fine imagination. . . . There never falls from his pen a mean, poor, or undignified line. If you once begin to read him, the music of his pages draws you on and on with increasing interest; you find that he has dramatic as well as poetic power, and you follow him to the close. . . . We could produce many beautiful pictures from the book. . . . Readers of refined taste will derive enjoyment from its sentiment, its classic grace, and its atmosphere of pure and delicate fancy."

Christian Life, February 25th, 1888.

"We wish we could do justice here to the grace and dignity, the literary skill and music of this beautiful poem. . . . Mr. Hayes will probably reach a very high mark indeed among the poets of the last decade of our century."

Inquirer, May 12th, 1888.

"A noteworthy poem. . . . He must be a very dull reader who should tire of this work. . . . We thank Mr. Hayes for a poem full of the deepest pathos, and written with great felicity of diction. . . . Its incidents are set forth with a gracious gentleness which moves the heart, and its portraiture of Nature shows the seer-like quality of the true poet. We shall expect even finer work from such a writer."

Nonconformist, September 20th, 1888.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THE LAST CRUSADE.

SECOND EDITION.

Crown 8vo, 6s. 6d.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

"A poem of considerable promise. . . . We were especially struck with the clearness and musical flow of the blank verse, and with the entire absence of any trick of style or affectation. The description of the plague in the camp is vivid and powerful, and the character of the chivalrous and impassioned king is conceived with imagination and insight."

Westminster Review, April, 1888.

"Of real and undoubted excellence. . . . Mr. Hayes has poetic power of an even higher order, and if he improves and develops he is sure to win a distinguished position among the poets of our time. . . . He has the instinct which tells an artist when he has got a good subject, whilst he possesses also that imaginative sympathy which enables the true poet to reach out of himself, and to grasp the thoughts and feelings of others. . . . We can confidently assert that there are but few living poets who could have done better."

Literary World, March 11th, 1887.

"The narrative moves on for the most part in stately, and sometimes very musical, blank verse, flashing out occasionally into noble thoughts and felicitous figures. The tone is throughout lofty, and the diction remarkably pure, while some of the sonorous cadences are particularly fine. The verse is robust and vigorous. . . . The description given of the attempt of a party of fanatic Moslems to penetrate to the royal pavilion is exceedingly good, and the scene between the dying monarch and his son is highly dramatic. There is undoubtedly power and passion in the work before us."

Public Opinion, January 21st, 1887.

"This volume of Mr. Hayes's has real merits, and gives him a claim to the consideration of all those who are lovers of English poetry. . . . Mr. Hayes is attempting to keep up what we believe to be the best and healthiest tradition of English poetry. . . . The various characters are clearly and sharply drawn, and the speeches put into their mouths appropriate and telling. . . . The description of the plague and the plague-stricken camp is exceedingly powerful, and there is real poetic beauty in the descriptions of Alpine solitude and Alpine glory."

The Guardian, March 23rd, 1887.

"'The Last Crusade' contains poetry of an unusually high order, both as to matter and manner. . . . Nothing could be better of its kind than the way in which the story of St. Louis' death is told; the description of the plague-stricken camp is also very powerful. . . . There is quite enough in the volume to arouse sanguine hopes of his possible future."

Graphic, January 1st, 1887.

"By far the most promising of the poets now before us is Mr. Alfred Hayes, author of 'The Last Crusade.' Mr. Hayes can write excellent blank verse."

Pall Mall Gazette, April 28th, 1887.

"The portrait of the king is as lovely as it is heroic. . . . Such dazzling visions of stainless snow and ice, breaking with their radiance upon the heavenly blue; such glowing sunset changes upon the Alpine heights; such magical sunrises and moonlights on those white fields and crags, have seldom been flashed upon the 'inward eye' with such spirit-stirring vividness, except by Mr. Ruskin himself. . . . Any lover of the sea will find here enchanting pictures of its changing moods. . . . The striking thing about the whole book is its individuality; it is not an echo, it is a new voice."

Journal of Education, April 1st, 1887.

"Mr. Hayes is a poet of no mean order and will without doubt make a name for himself."

City Press, March 30th, 1887.

"Mr. Hayes has given the world a series of very remarkable and highly-finished poems, which testify not only to abundant labour and the most loving care on the part of the author, but also to his possession of the true poetic talent in a very high degree."

Oxford Review, February 9th, 1887.

"Mr. Hayes possesses a keen sense of fitness and a fine insight into the shifting phases of Nature."

Oxford Magazine, January 26th, 1887.

"The predominant thought as we lay aside the volume, after such a draught of poetry as no new poet has given us for a long time, is the perception of the exquisitely-perfect finish of the whole, every verse, and every modulation and pause, satisfying the sense—that triumph of verbal music where the informing thought is echoed by the sound and cadence of the words. Mr. Hayes has not only the poet's eye and hand, but, what is of far more import, the poet's heart. . . . There is a quite singular delicacy and truth in the metaphors and similes. . . . We had marked many more passages, for they are as thick as dew gems on the morning hill-side. . . . The subject on which Mr. Hayes has lavished all this poetic wealth is one well worthy of commemoration. . . . As a piece of descriptive writing this is magnificent. . . . No quotation could do justice to a picture which depends for effect on the aptitude of harmonious parts. . . . In a passage of noble eloquence and pathos Mr. Hayes points the moral of this dreadful scene. . . . A very remarkable and singularly beautiful poem; not an ephemeral production, but one which is a distinct gain to contemporary poetic literature, and which promises a future of mark to its gifted author."

Birmingham Daily Post, December 3rd, 1886.

"'The Last Crusade' contains many passages of striking beauty and originality. . . . Saint Louis was the King Arthur of modern times—'working out his will to cleanse the world'—and Mr. Hayes determined to enshrine his deeds in the same manner as the Laureate has immortalised those of his hero. The result is surprising because it is so successful. The Doric style of verse, with its compactness and condensation, cannot be trifled with, and only

master-hands can use it with ease or grace. Mr. Hayes's poems display great power. The descriptive parts are vivid, rich, and invested with natural charm; the sentiment is at all times worthy of the theme. Some of the phrases seem to sparkle gem-like on the pages; others, instinct with music, at once arrest attention. . . . Here we find that rare combination, daring fancy, and harmonious expression. There is such subtlety in the lines that their 'mysterious glimmer' exercises a magic influence over the mind of the reader. . . . The chasteness of sentiment is another striking characteristic of the poems. . . . His pictures have the merit of being real, we see and understand them; the view is never obscure, the brightness is never too fierce or the colouring too rich. . . . His solemn and impressive lines on 'Silence,' which form the prelude to 'The Burial of Saint Louis,' are so unique, so marvellous and so original, that we must do more than simply refer to them. . . . Mr. Hayes is a true poet. When he becomes his own *daimon* he will assuredly take a position to which all poets aspire, but which few are able to attain."

Birmingham Daily Gazette, December 22nd, 1886.

"The author has certainly drunk at the same well as 'God's Prophets of the Beautiful.' . . . The affectation and fustian which so often pass under the name of poetry are absent from this volume. . . . The story is told in easy flowing verse, which arrests the attention and commands the sympathy of the reader."

Manchester Courier, March 25th and September 9th, 1887.

"Mr. Hayes is a poet, and his book contains many proofs that he has the poet's heart as well as the poet's hand and eye. High poetical thoughts are here set in words worthy of them. One might fill columns with instances."

Eastern Morning News, December 30th, 1886.

"A poem of singular grace and power. . . . In the midst of a great deal of contemporary verse which is simply melodious or simply didactic, it is refreshing to find such a combination of vigour and music as is to be met with in this trilogy of 'The Last Crusade.' . . . There is some excellent character-painting, and the character of Louis is an admirable study of majestic gentleness. . . . Mr. Hayes displays great dramatic power."

Leeds Mercury, December 17th, 1886.

“‘The Last Crusade’ is a narrative poem of great merit. . . . It is marked by exquisite finish. . . . The impressive atmosphere of the poem can only be gathered from a perusal of it as a whole.”

Manchester City News, February 19th, 1887.

“‘The Last Crusade’ is one of the most notable books of the season. . . . We hope we have done enough to induce all lovers of the highest kind of poetry to get the book and give it what it deserves—an honoured place on their library shelves.”

Liverpool Review, January 8th, 1887.

“Mr. Hayes, in fixing upon his subject, has shown much wisdom and insight. In the treatment of the subject we find all through the true touch. It is, indeed, no small praise that, high as the argument is, full justice is done to it by the refinement of sentiment, and the glow of imagination by which these poems are characterised. The language too, while absolutely free from affectations, is always impressive—impressive by reason of its very simplicity. . . . The descriptions of Alpine scenery are magnificent.”

Midland Counties Herald, Nov. 25th and Dec. 30th, 1886.

“Mr. Hayes is no mere rhymester, but his verse has the true dignity and beauty which the genuine poetic faculty alone can impart. It has

Fervency, freedom, fluency of thought,
Harmony, strength, words exquisitely sought;
Fancy, that from the bow that spans the sky
Brings colours dipped in heaven, that never die.

. . . . ‘The Burial of Saint Louis’ abounds in fine descriptions of scenery. . . . Here we reluctantly make an end of culling extracts. We think we have fulfilled our promise of showing that a true poet has risen up among us.”

Staffordshire Advertiser, December 24th, 1886.

“A new poet has discovered himself in England, whose verse betrays the genuine poetic faculty, and develops both dignity and beauty of thought and expression. . . . The description of the scaling of Nazareth is painfully thrilling and strikingly dramatic.”

Boston Post, U. S. A., January 15th, 1887.



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